Albertans one step from glory

Kleibrink squeaks into final with win in extra end

1-2 GAME

By Larry Wood
Heart Chart Editor

The best team in the Scotties round robin continued to be the best team in the Tournament Of Hearts on Friday night at the Brandt Centre.

Shannon Kleibrink's Calgarians, with only one loss in 11 games, added an 11th victory in the Page One-Two playoff match with an 8-7 extra-end conquest of Ontario's Sherry Middaugh that began in dominating fashion and concluded with the Alberta skip requiring an open hit after blowing a four-foot draw in the final frame.

"I thought we had control until I missed my last one in 10," said the Alberta skip whose team of Amy Nixon, Bronwen Saunders and Chelsey Bell will take today off before playing for the national title on Sunday morning at 11:30 a.m.

"But we still had hammer so you have to look at it that way. If it was going to be a one-end game and you're the one who has the hammer, you take it, right?"

The shot of the match turned out to be a blistering runner delivered by third Nixon in the eighth end with Ontario threatening a major comeback with frozen rocks in the four-foot ring.

Alberta skip Shannon Kleibrink.

When Nixon unleashed her rocket, all the fastened stones scattered and Alberta was left with three counters.

Nixon's comment after making the shot: "Not bad for a 115-pounder!"

Said Kleibrink:

"That shot was, for sure, the TSN turning point. We got in a bad position that end and she threw big, I don't know where that came from, makes the triple and lays three. That was the best shot I've ever seen made at this stage of the Scotties, that was amazing.

"She (Nixon) is always on fire but that one shot that turned it around, that was all her."

Middaugh was left shaking her head.

"What can you do?" she asked. "We could have crossed that by maybe another quarter of a rock and tapped our back one back maybe six more inches but, yeah, she made a pistol of a shot. Maybe if we could have put up a guard. There are not a lot of women who can make those shots. I don't know where she throws it from, her big toe? She almost came to a stop and then shoved it but it was dead accurate."

The score was deadlocked at 5-5 at the time but the resulting situation wound up with split rings for Alberta and an open hit for two from Kleibrink.

Once again, the Calgary team roared from gate and constructed a 4-1 lead in three with deuces on the first and third ends. Kleibrink's shot for two in the third was particularly precise. She angled an Ontario rock from the four-foot to avoid a jam and count the pair.

Alberta had another chance for a deuce in the fifth and a four-point lead but settled for one. Then Middaugh produced a deuce in the sixth and then stole the tying point in the seventh when cracks started to appear in the Alberta armour. Kleibrink jammed on a tap-back with her first stone and then threw heavy on a button draw.

Third Amy Nixon made a huge shot for the Albertans in the eighth end.

Middaugh was held to one in the ninth end when she blew her last-rock draw for a deuce but Kleibrink's last miscue extended the argument to overtime.

"It's nice to be in the final but being there doesn't mean anything unless you win it," said the Calgary skip.

She did, however, feel Friday's toughie would serve her team well.

"It was a hard game," she agreed. "We have another one on Sunday so I'm glad I have this one. It was nice to play one like that now that we have a day off. We made a lot of good tough shots. We had lots of draws, we know that our rocks are good. We're happy."

Middaugh was philosophical about being thrust right back into the fire at 10:30 this morning against 2005 champion Jennifer Jones of Winnipeg in the semi-final.

"We have to take the positives out of this, park the ones we didn't make and come out a little more focused in the beginning," she said.

"We know they (Manitoba) are going to be on a high — they obviously were curling well today. Quite frankly we just need to make more shots early."

And she said she likes her chances more than in previous bids.

"I'm certainly a lot more mentally tough than I was a couple of years ago," she said. "That may result from experience, age, whatever, but we've had a great week and we know we can make the shots, we just have to make them now.

"It's going to be a rough sleep tonight because I'm going to be dreaming about the draw in the ninth end (for two) but that's the only one. It was just one shot. Shannon normally makes that routine shot in the 10th, too, so . .

"It's just a matter of us making shots in the beginning, really. We have to be mentally prepared because, you know, we have a l0-minute practice so there's no excuse for not making shots."